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ABSTRACT

A case study of Sullins College, which in 1975 requested that the state of Virginia investigate the feasibility of incorporating the college into the state's public higher education system, is presented. This small, private, two-year college in southwest Virginia had been struggling for several years to maintain its small enrollment. Historical information about the predominantly women's college, its environment, enrollment trends, and financial conditions are briefly examined. The college's request to the state occurred at a time when the public institutions were competing actively for a diminishing share of state revenues, and state takeover of Sullins College might have prompted other private colleges facing difficulties to make similar appeals. Additionally, some state-supported institutions already had surplus student space. The focus of the feasibility study was institutional accessibility in terms of demographic trends, accessibility to programs of study in the region, and the costs of acquiring Sullins College. The alternative to defining Sullins College's mission in terms of the traditional two-year or four-year liberal arts curriculum and regional audience was to focus on a specialized curriculum aimed at a broader potential student population than that of the greater Bristol region. Three alternative uses of Sullins College were examined: a state school of the arts, a middle college, and an early admissions college. The state decided against the acquisition of Sullins College. Wellmore Coal Corporation purchased the college and plans to use the facilities as a cultural center and a private day school. (SW)

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SOUTHERN REGIONAL EDUCATION BOARD

EVALUATING A PRIVATE COLLEGE REQUEST FOR STATE AFFILIATION: A CASE STUDY OF SULLINS COLLEGE IN VIRGINIA

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Southern Regional Education Board
130 Sixth Street, N.W.
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1981

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This case study by Richard J. Meisinger, Jr.,* was commissioned by the Southern Regional Education Board as part of a comprehensive study of the public policy issues associated with enrollment decline and financial distress in colleges and universities. For a complete report of this project, see the forthcoming publication: James R. Mingle and Associates, Challenges of Retrenchment: Strategies for Consolidating Programs, Cutting Costs, and Reallocating Resources (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass). Readers are referred also to the two other cases dealing with "State Policy and Private College Distress," published by SREB: "Private College Mergers and State Policy: A Case Study of New York" by Gail S. Chambers, and "State Policy and Private Higher Education in Tennessee" by E. Grady Bogue. Funds for these studies were provided in part by the Ford Foundation.

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INTRODUCTION

In early 1975, Sullins College--a small, private, two-year college in southwest Virginia--requested that the state investigate the feasibility of incorporating the college into the state's public higher education system. Sullins College had been struggling for several years to maintain its small enrollment base, but the size of the student body had dropped precipitously. The institution was nearly $1 million in debt, and the financial prospects for continued operation without a change in mission or affiliation were bleak.

Governor Mills E. Godwin, Jr., directed the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to conduct a thorough study of the possible incorporation of Sullins College into the state public system and to report to him by September 1, 1975, on its findings. The Council study took longer than anticipated, and before it was completed, the governor announced, on October 28, 1975, that it was not feasible to pursue the possibility of incorporating Sullins into the state-supported system. The process by which this decision was reached is an interesting case study in the state politics of retrenchment in higher education.

HISTORY OF SULLINS COLLEGE

Sullins College was established in 1870, in Bristol, Virginia, as an educational institution of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. For most of the period from 1870 to 1915, its program included a grammar school, high school, and, in the latter part of the period, a collegiate curriculum on completion of which baccalaureate degrees were granted, although the offerings were not substantially more advanced than the two-year program of the institution's last

years. When fire destroyed the Sullins College buildings in 1916, the Methodist Church, beset with financial problems, declined to rebuild the institution. Sullins College was reestablished in 1917 as a privately owned junior college for women on property donated by the city of Bristol. The program included two years of college, four years of high school, and, at the outset, a small grammar school. Sullins College began to phase out the high school department in 1946, completing the operation in 1957.

At the time of the Council study, Sullins offered a liberal arts program designed to prepare students for transfer after graduation to four-year institutions for study toward the baccalaureate degree. The college was attempting to overcome its image as a "finishing" school for young women and had only recently begun to enroll some male "day" (i.e., nonresidential) students.

SULLINS COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT

Sullins College owned 125 acres of land located in two areas. The main campus--located in Bristol, a community of approximately 15,000 residents--occupied 75 acres and contained 15 principal buildings. The remaining 50 acres were located at Camp Sequoya on a lake approximately 15 miles from the main campus. Although Camp Sequoya was a department of the college which had accommodations for 250 campers and was used throughout the year by students, faculty, and administrators for recreational and meeting purposes, the facilities were not an integral part of the institution's academic mission.

A Sullins student could pursue one of four different degree programs leading to associate degrees in: arts, fine arts, applied science, and general studies. In addition to its academic programs, Sullins College saw community service as an important mission. Noncredit programs in dance, equitation,

foreign languages, and music were offered to local residents. Leisure time and college-level credit programs were offered to students of all ages by the Vatan School of Crafts division of the college. Also, the facilities of Camp Sequoya were offered--either at a small cost or in many cases at no cost--to other colleges, public institutions, and civic groups in the area.

ENROLLMENT TRENDS AND FINANCIAL CONDITIONS AT SULLINS COLLEGE

Sullins College experienced its largest headcount enrollment in fall 1968, with 358 students. After that time, the enrollment declined steadily to a low of 214 students in fall 1974. There was a parallel decline in the number of graduates--from a high of 142 in 1967 down to 84 in 1975. The decline in enrollments paralleled a downturn in the gross number of applications received by the college. After the 1964-65 recruiting year, when a total of 752 applications (for 1965-66) were received, gross applications declined 75 percent to 191 applications for 1974-75. An examination of the freshman class profiles for 1971-72 through 1975-76 indicates that the number of students from Virginia and Tennessee remained reasonably stable until fall 1975, when the Virginia contribution declined somewhat. The number of freshman students from other states, however, dwindled during that five-year period.

For the fiscal year ending May 31, 1975, Sullins College had total operating revenues of approximately $1.366 million, but operated at a deficit of $117,000. (Included in these figures were the operation of Camp Sequoya and auxiliary enterprises.) Tuition and fees accounted for 35 percent of the total operating revenues; gifts accounted for 9 percent. Unrestricted endowment income was responsible for only 1 percent of the total operating revenues.

Camp Sequoya earned a net of approximately $53,000, but auxiliary enterprises lost nearly $60,000.

Sullins College incurred annual operating deficits during four of the five years prior to fiscal year 1975 (1971-72 being the exception), due in part to declining enrollments and the concomitant loss of tuition income, and to inflation and the rising costs of operation. Also, the college had financed its building program primarily from current funds. The current fund deficit for the fiscal year ending May 31, 1975, was approximately $736,000. In addition, the new buildings on campus were encumbered with long-term bonds payable in the amount of $535,000. The college endowment was nearly $273,000, consisting primarily of $22,000 in investments and $241,000 in land and outside residences. (The endowment asset valuations are quoted at book value rather than current market value.)

SULLINS COLLEGE'S REQUEST FOR FEASIBILITY STUDY

In February of 1975, Sullins College president Claudius H. Pritchard, Jr., wrote to Governor Godwin, requesting that a feasibility study be undertaken to determine whether or not the state would incorporate the college into its public higher education system. Pritchard indicated that the Sullins Board was not committed to the idea of becoming state-supported, but that he personally favored that alternative. He also argued that unless a college was well-known and had a sizable endowment, its status as a private institution would be questionable. (Two options, in addition to the state takeover, had recently been discussed by a study committee: (1) keeping the college essentially as it was; and (2) converting the college to a relatively new educational concept in which students would be accepted in their junior year of high school, would

take college classes for four years, and would then be awarded an associate of arts degree.) In making the request for a study, Pritchard noted that Sullins College did not ask for an affiliation with any existing state-supported institution, but that the state would be free to recommend such an affiliation.

Although the board of trustees of Sullins was officially credited with suggesting that the college become part of the state-supported system, the idea was originated by Pritchard. He also made the preliminary contacts with state officials, including the governor, to discuss the idea of affiliation, while a blue-ribbon committee appointed by the board of trustees was reviewing alternative directions for Sullins.

In a letter to Daniel E. Marvin, Jr., director of the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia, in mid-February 1975, Governor Godwin stated, "It is my general understanding that it is the sense of the board of trustees that the college property might be conveyed to the Commonwealth without cost if it were determined that the facilities could be used advantageously as a publicly supported institution of higher education." The governor told Dr. Marvin that he was transmitting the request for a feasibility study with his endorsement, and he asked for a recommendation by September 1, 1975.

Even before the Council staff began its study, some members of the Council privately questioned the feasibility of absorbing Sullins College into the state-supported system at a time when the public institutions were competing actively for a diminishing share of state revenues. These Council members feared in part that if the Council recommended the state takeover of Sullins, a number of other small, struggling private colleges might make similar appeals. Furthermore, the Council members were very sensitive to the fact that some

state-supported institutions already had surplus student space, and that the surplus capacity would increase as enrollments tapered off in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

When the reservations of several Council members were made public by the press, President Pritchard expressed his disappointment over what he labeled as "inappropriate" statements and news reports. Moreover, he argued that the questions raised by some of the Council members should not be viewed as the Council's official position. Council staff director Marvin assured Pritchard that he had simply informed the Council of Sullins' request for a feasibility study, and that the Council staff would undertake a thorough review of the case.

On May 6, 1975, the members of the Council visited the Sullins College campus for the purpose of gaining some first-hand impressions, as preparation for undertaking the feasibility study requested by the governor. During the visit Marvin indicated that the Council staff would attempt to complete the study by August, to coincide with the submission of budget requests from the state colleges and universities to the governor's budget office.

The last public mention of the Sullins College study for several months appeared on May 18, 1975, in a lengthy Richmond Times-Dispatch article by Gary Robertson titled, "Should State Run Sullins?" Despite the adverse circumstances at the institution, Sullins officials maintained adamantly that their proposal for state affiliation was not made out of any sense of desperation. President Pritchard was quoted as saying that "we just came to the conclusion that our best bet for educational effectiveness lies in the public sector. The private women's college is not the wave of the future . . . and we want Sullins at the cutting edge of what's going to be, not at the tail end."

Pritchard also pointed out that the state would be getting a bargain if it assumed responsibility for the college--a $13.5-million (replacement cost) physical plant and two campuses, with no strings attached. He also argued that such a takeover would provide a state-supported institution in an area of Virginia that desperately needed one. Too many southwest Virginians, he claimed, were forced to attend college in neighboring Tennessee and North Carolina. Moreover, the offer was viewed as an opportunity to use Sullins as an innovative and special-purpose campus in the statewide system.

The Robertson article noted that there had been some opposition from alumnae concerning Sullins' proposal to affiliate with the state-supported system, but that most graduates approved of the concept once it had been fully explained to them. The faculty and staff, the students, the area's planning district, the Bristol Chamber of Commerce, local governing bodies, and some legislators all went on record favoring state affiliation. To indicate the extent of commitment for keeping Sullins College afloat, every member of the faculty and staff agreed to take a 10 percent salary cut for the 1975-76 academic year to enable the college to achieve a balanced budget.

COUNCIL FEASIBILITY STUDY: SULLINS COLLEGE AS A TRADITIONAL TWO- OR FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION

The Council staff began its feasibility study in late summer, 1975. The focus of its analysis was threefold: (1) institutional accessibility in terms of demographic trends, (2) accessibility to programs of study in the region, and (3) the costs of acquiring Sullins College.

Demographic Trends and Institutional Accessibility. The southwest region of Virginia in the broadest sense was supported by one public four-year

institution (Clinch Valley College), four public community colleges (Mountain Empire, Virginia Highlands, Southwest Virginia, and Wytheville), two private four-year institutions (Virginia Intermont College and Emory and Henry College), and two private two-year institutions (Sullins College and Bluefield College). Moreover, two nearby four-year institutions in Tennessee (public East Tennessee State University and private King College) served a large number of Virginia residents.

A significant consideration in evaluating institutional accessibility was the geographical relationship of Sullins College to the other institutions in the Bristol region. The Council staff concluded that should Sullins College cease operation and should the state be unwilling to acquire the institution, residents of the Bristol area would still be within easy commuting distances of three private four-year institutions, one public four-year institution, and one public two-year institution, and within 70 miles' commuting distance of Clinch Valley College.

In addition to the number of institutions and their geographic locations, an equally important question was the present and future demand for higher education in the Bristol region. The most important population trends for the study were those of the 15- to 19-year-old and the 20- to 24-year-old populations--the two groups comprising most of the degree-credit undergraduates in higher education. (The analysis started at the early age of 15 because the Division of State Planning and Community Affairs data were grouped that way.) In summary, the population projections for the five neighboring counties and for the city of Bristol showed that the pool of potential degree-credit undergraduates in the 15- to 24-year-old age group would decline between 1970 and

1995. Although the decline would be compensated for in part by an increasing proportion of adult (22 years old and older) degree-credit undergraduates, it did not appear that adult undergraduates would make up the deficit completely. Thus, there appeared to be sufficient traditional two-year and four-year undergraduate institutions in the Bristol area.

Three other factors were considered in weighing institutional accessibility: (1) potential for growth in the non-degree-credit area; (2) degree of access to higher education for potential students in the Bristol region; and (3) the projected capital outlay for Clinch Valley College and Virginia Highlands Community College. In reviewing these factors, the Council staff believed that the aggregate instructional capacity of institutions in the Bristol area was underutilized. Furthermore, in terms of sheer numbers, in 1975 the Sullins College student body could have been absorbed readily by other institutions in the area. A two- or four-year public institution in place of Sullins would, in fact, have absorbed students from already underutilized facilities, thereby leading to a situation of fiscal exigency for some or all of the public and private institutions in the Bristol region.

The Council staff noted that few if any local Virginia (Bristol and neighboring counties) residents attending Sullins College would be denied access to some form of postsecondary education if Sullins College were to close. Fewer than 25 Sullins College students in fall 1974 were from the local area. The Council staff also concluded that the introduction of a new two- or four-year public institution on the Sullins College campus would

seriously undercut the potential applicant base of most public and private institutions in the Bristol region.

The Council staff concluded that all present and future (at least until 1990) demands for postsecondary education in the region could be met with existing facilities, even if Sullins College were to cease operations. Thus, the state acquisition of Sullins College as a traditional two- or four-year institution with a regional clientele could not be justified on the basis of a need for additional college facilities.

Accessibility to Programs of Study. In assessing student opportunities for postsecondary education, the Council staff considered the availability of programs within the institutions to which the students had access. In particular, if Sullins College were to have ceased operations, other institutions in the area could have provided access to a similar range of associate degree programs. Assuming that the state acquired Sullins College as a two-year vocational/technical and liberal arts institution, the core of program offerings would have overlapped considerably with those of Virginia Highlands Community College and Virginia Intermont College. The range of program offerings would have been governed in large part by the institution's enrollment, however.

Were Sullins College to have become a traditional public four-year institution, there would have been considerable duplication of programs offered at nearby institutions. If Sullins College were to have functioned in such a mode, demographic projections dictated that it would have done so with a relatively small student body. Consequently, there was no way that Sullins could have begun to offer the wide range of programs found at nearby colleges. A public Sullins College with a favorable tuition schedule might have drawn students

from the local private institutions--much to the disadvantage of the private sector.

The Council staff was sensitive to the argument of Virginia residents in the Bristol area that a public four-year Sullins College would be a low-tuition alternative to the high cost of attending a private institution or of crossing the state border to attend East Tennessee State University. Although the tuition rates at Clinch Valley College were favorable to Virginia residents, it was noted that Clinch Valley would remain an unreasonable commuting distance from Bristol until the new highways were completed. A public Sullins College would not have attracted many Tennessee residents with its tuition schedule, because they could attend East Tennessee State University for less and would have more academic programs from which to choose. Moreover, many Virginia residents in the Bristol area, especially those seeking graduate programs, would not attend a public Sullins College because the college would not have the "critical mass" of enrollments to offer the range of programs at East Tennessee State University which attracted Virginia residents in the first place. It was believed that East Tennessee State University would continue to meet much of the demand in the Bristol region for bachelor's and higher level degree programs, the out-of-state tuition notwithstanding. Also, the out-of-state tuition was not particularly high at East Tennessee State University.

In addition to the degree programs, the continuing education needs of the Bristol region were another important aspect of accessibility to programs. Within the area, Virginia Highlands Community College was heavily committed to broad-based continuing and adult education. In fact, approximately 55 percent of the students at Virginia Highlands were part-time. Moreover, the Western

Regional Consortium for Continuing Higher Education attempted to satisfy unique degree and non-degree needs of residents of southwest Virginia. Rather than having the state acquire and operate a traditional college for which there would probably be insufficient demand, it was suggested that Virginia Highlands Community College and the Western Regional Consortium make a thorough assessment of the unmet educational needs of Bristol area residents, and seek to address those needs.

Costs of Acquiring Sullins College. The cost to the Commonwealth of acquiring and maintaining Sullins College as a public postsecondary institution was divided into two categories: one-time costs and annual operating costs. Most of the one-time costs consisted of the cumulative current fund deficit and the long-term federal bonds previously incurred to finance building construction. After taking into consideration the estimated income from the anticipated sale of some endowment real estate, the Council staff estimated that a minimum appropriation by the Commonwealth of approximately $1,026,000 (less the market value of the endowment upon acquisition) would be required at the beginning of June 1976 to make Sullins College a financially solvent institution upon its inauguration as a state-supported institution. That amount would have been greater, however, if the proposed mission of Sullins College demanded that the dormitories be renovated extensively and converted to additional instructional and office space, or that the library collection be upgraded and enlarged significantly. A considerable portion of the debt obligation could have been offset through the sale of Camp Sequoya, which was not an integral part of the academic program at Sullins College.

The annual operating costs of Virginia's colleges and universities are determined by enrollment-driven budget guidelines. The enrollments used to estimate the cost of operating Sullins College as a public institution were governed by space limitations in existing facilities and by the proposed mission of the institution. For example, based on housing capacity, Sullins could have provided a residential collegiate experience for approximately 425 students. (A limiting factor for enrollments was library space, sufficient for 756 students.) To project a range of annual costs to the state of operating the college, the enrollment range was assumed to be 425 to 1,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students for either a two-year or a four-year curriculum. These enrollment limits were selected only to provide an estimate of the range of operating costs. Maintaining a public four-year institution with an enrollment of only 425 students could have been seriously questioned on educational grounds, because the institutions in Virginia which were expected to face the greatest challenge to their fiscal and academic well-being during the anticipated retrenchment of the next decade were the four-year institutions with enrollments of fewer than 1,000 students.

Budgets for two-year community colleges assumed an enrollment composition of 60 percent vocational/technical students and 40 percent liberal arts students. A two-year community college with 425 FTE students would have cost approximately $1,310,000 to operate, exclusive of public service expenditures, and would require $1,214,000 net in General Fund support, whereas a similar institution with 1,000 FTE students would have cost approximately $2,360,000 to operate, exclusive of public service expenditures, and would require $2,135,000 net in General Fund support. Two-year liberal arts colleges with

enrollments of 425 to 1,000 FTE students would have been somewhat less expensive to operate, costing approximately $1,226,000 and $2,166,000, and requiring $1,047,000 and $1,746,000 net in General Fund support, respectively. Four-year liberal arts institutions with enrollments of 425 and 1,000 FTE students would have cost approximately $1,473,000 and $2,428,000 and would require $1,295,000 and $2,008,000 net in General Fund support, respectively. Were the state to acquire Sullins College facilities and not utilize them immediately, the annual cost just to maintain the physical plant would have been approximately $326,670. In summary, the Council staff concluded that such expenditures would be made without significantly improving the access of Virginia residents to postsecondary education.

COUNCIL FEASIBILITY STUDY: THE ACQUISITION OF SULLINS COLLEGE AS A SPECIAL-PURPOSE INSTITUTION

The alternative to defining Sullins College's mission in terms of the traditional two- or four-year liberal arts curriculum and regional audience was to focus on a specialized curriculum aimed at a broader potential student population than that of the greater Bristol region. The justification for a specialized institution would need to be based upon statewide rather than regional needs. The narrowness of the range of program offerings at a special-purpose college suggests that in most cases a student body sufficiently large to warrant the existence of the institution must be recruited from a population base larger than a region. The assessment of the feasibility of special-purpose institutions, especially those with relatively innovative or unique missions, was hampered somewhat by the lack of accurate "market data" on statewide student demand for programs. Three alternative uses of Sullins College were examined

by the Council staff: (1) a State School of the Arts, (2) a "middle" college, and (3) an "early admissions" college.

Sullins College as a State School of the Arts. As one alternative for a public, special-purpose four-year institution, Sullins College officials proposed that the North Carolina School of the Arts be used as a model. The programs at the North Carolina School of the Arts are in the performing arts--music, dance, drama, design, and production--and have a liberal arts core. (At Sullins, programs in art and photography were to be considered in designing the proposed curriculum.)

If a full range of fine arts programs were established, Sullins College would have been deficient in some equipment and accommodations. However, the major facilities constraint was the library collection, which would have had to be upgraded to support a core liberal arts curriculum and would have had to be expanded in the fine arts as well. The cost for upgrading the fine arts collection (including library furniture) might have exceeded $1 million.

More important than the facility constraints was the question of student demand. A number of public senior institutions in Virginia already offered programs in the arts, and several community colleges offered two-year programs in the fine arts. Clearly, there was a sufficient number of programs in the fine arts at other public institutions throughout the state to provide easy access, and there were more than enough openings to satisfy student demand. Moreover, one of Virginia Intermont College's strongest programs was in the performing arts; the introduction of a duplicate program at Sullins College would have undermined seriously Virginia Intermont's efforts. With such thorough coverage it was difficult to justify a statewide fine arts program at Sullins.

Although an urban environment was not an essential condition for fine arts programs in a comprehensive college or university, accessibility to such an environment was deemed a crucial ingredient of the philosophy of a special-purpose institution with a fine arts program. The Tri-Cities region (Bristol-Kingsport-Johnson City) could not provide the critical mass of community cultural offerings (such as museums, theaters, dance and symphonic companies) so necessary to complement the academic programs on campus. Institutions in the vicinity of Richmond and Washington, D.C., for example, were considered to be in a much better position than Sullins College to strengthen their fine arts programs through the ambient culture of a more urban setting.

Sullins College as an "Early Admissions" or "Middle" College. In the process of analyzing possibilities for Sullins, the Council found that the most promising alternative for the college appeared to be an "early admissions" or "middle" college mission. An early admissions institution would provide a one- or two-year residential liberal arts program for early-entry college students, usually highly gifted individuals who had completed their junior year of high school. Graduates of an early admissions college would be able to transfer to a four-year institution as juniors, thereby saving one year in the course of attaining a bachelor's degree. A middle college would offer a four-year residential liberal arts program leading to either an associate or a bachelor's degree. Self-directed and self-disciplined high school students who had completed at least their tenth year of school would be admitted. Depending upon their time of entry and their interests, some students might have wanted merely to finish their high school years doing college-level work, while others might have wanted to complete the requirements for an associate degree before

transferring to another institution for study toward a bachelor's degree, and still others might have wanted to remain at the middle college to complete their requirements for the bachelor's degree.

These two alternatives were appealing for a number of reasons. By the end of their sophomore or junior year in high school, many gifted and motivated students were academically ready to undertake college-level work. Because early admissions and middle colleges were not generally available nationally, many college freshmen obliged to complete four years of high school found their initial collegiate year to be repetitive of some of their secondary school experience. As an early admissions or middle college, Sullins would have permitted the state's gifted students to begin their college-level work one or two years earlier, in a small-campus environment with students of similar age. Extensive educational and personal counseling services would have been provided. Moreover, the early admissions or middle college could have allowed greater faculty-student interchange through low student-faculty ratios. In 1975, the Commonwealth of Virginia offered its gifted high school students enriched high school courses, special programs of enrichment, early admissions, and advanced placement in college, but none of the approaches could provide the same range of benefits as those found in a complete and coordinated program. Moreover, an early admissions program for the state's gifted students was congruent with The Virginia Plan for Higher Education approved by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia in 1974.

Although the concept of an early admissions college was attractive educationally, the Council staff had some serious reservations concerning the location of either that model or the middle college at Sullins. First, planning

for such an innovative institution would have required a joint effort on the part of the State Council of Higher Education and the Department of Education. Once agreement between these two agencies had been reached on the scope and governance of the enterprise, the school systems would then have to be convinced that the early admission of high school-age students would not affect seriously their own enrollments. These latter concerns would have been addressed in the establishment of admissions criteria, which might have included regional quotas. Finally, the quality of the programs of the new institution would have to be guaranteed for the senior colleges which would accept the college credit earned. At least a skeleton staff of faculty and administrators would have to be recruited during the early planning stages so that they could participate with officials of the State Council of Higher Education, Department of Education, and school districts in developing a curriculum for the new institution. The Council staff was sensitive to the fact that articulation between the secondary and postsecondary sectors had not been extremely successful in the past, and that improvements in the future would come only with the expenditure of considerable effort and time. During any planning process, the Sullins facilities would probably have stood unused.

An additional constraint, the quality of the Sullins College library, could have been addressed by a one-time appropriation of funds. Several high schools throughout Virginia already provided sophisticated education programs and resources, including modern library resource centers, programmed self-paced instruction, and computer-assisted instruction. Many gifted students moving to an early admissions or middle college would have had high expectations for the facilities at that institution, expectations which might not have been met

by Sullins College. The library was the most deficient facility and the one which would have cost the most to correct.

The Council staff's strongest reservation against the establishment of an early admissions or middle college at Sullins was its geographical location. Bristol is quite distant from Virginia's population centers, from which one would have expected a large proportion of the state's gifted high school-age students to be drawn. And many schools in major population centers already offered enriched programs for gifted students. In addition, it was argued that high school-age students at an early admissions or middle college would want to maintain their ties with their high schools. Social and family relationships are often strongest during this period of a student's life, and if these linkages were to be maintained, it meant locating a majority of the students as near as possible to their homes and high schools.

If the state were to have supported an institution for gifted high school-age students, it would have been preferable to locate the college near the libraries, museums, theaters, dance companies, and symphonies situated along the eastern population corridor of the state. Ideally, the early admissions college would have been located near a major public institution which offered a full spectrum of specialized programs that could not be provided by the smaller college. Thus, the early admissions student could have supplemented his or her basic liberal arts curriculum by taking special-interest courses at the neighboring institution. Also, a major institution could have provided library and other learning resources which would otherwise have been unavailable at a small college.

As a final caveat concerning the establishment of an early admissions or middle college at any location, the Council staff observed that such an institution should not be justified primarily on the basis of its cost-saving potential. Although these institutions would reduce the time necessary for a student to obtain a bachelor's degree, they would not reduce proportionately the cost to the state of educating students because these institutions would be very expensive to operate.

GOVERNOR'S DECISION ON SULLINS COLLEGE

The Council staff was prepared to recommend to the Council that in considering the use of Sullins College as a two-year community college or as a traditional two- or four-year liberal arts college, the costs to the Commonwealth would far outweigh the benefits of acquiring Sullins, and that none of the alternatives of changed mission were feasible.

However, before the State Council of Higher Education offered its final recommendations, Governor Godwin announced that it was not feasible to pursue the possibility of incorporating Sullins College into the state-supported system. His statement said in part: "In view of the present economic situation and the obvious limitations on revenue available for appropriation by the General Assembly in 1976, I have discussed the situation with representatives of Sullins and at my suggestion we have agreed that it would not be feasible to pursue the question of the state incorporating the college into the state system at this time." As a result of his decision, Godwin advised the State Council of Higher Education to discontinue its study of the Sullins College proposal.

The governor had been briefed on the progress of the State Council of Higher Education staff study and was aware that the analysis was not favorable to the

incorporation of Sullins College into the state-supported system. However, a major consideration in the governor's decision was probably the fact that he was faced with estimates of a $66-million budget deficit for the end of the 1974-75 biennium. The governor had only recently emerged from budget study sessions at which he told the presidents of public institutions of higher education that they had no chance of receiving the large budget increases most of them had requested for operations during the 1976-78 biennium. In light of the bleak fiscal picture, the governor had no alternative but to decide against the state takeover of Sullins College.

EPILOGUE

After the state decided against the acquisition of Sullins College, officials at the college entered into negotiations with the city of Bristol. It was proposed that the city acquire the college and assume responsibility for the accumulated debt. The college would remain a two-year institution but be under the control of the city's school board. In April 1976, the city of Bristol voted to acquire Sullins College, but shortly thereafter city officials reversed themselves. In July 1976, it was announced that Sullins College would close.

Sullins College was purchased by the Wellmore Coal Corporation, a subsidiary of United Coal Company, during that same summer. Wellmore intended to reopen the college as a two-year institution but decided against such a direction after making the purchase. Finally, in mid-1977, plans were announced to use the Sullins College facilities as a cultural center and a private day school.

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Sullins College Corporation, Report on Audit, (May 31) 1970-1975.

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The Sullins College study was discussed in the press on a number of occasions. A sampling of pertinent newspaper articles, in chronological order, follows:

February 14, 1975 The Richmond News Leader
"Sullins Study Requested by Godwin"

February 14, 1975 The Richmond Times-Dispatch
"Study of Sullins Slated by Godwin"

February 16, 1975 The Bristol Herald Courier
"A New Direction" (Editorial)

March 5, 1975 The Richmond Times-Dispatch
Charles Cox, "Bid to Take Over College Questioned"

March 7, 1975 The Richmond Times-Dispatch
"Reports Displease Educator"

May 18, 1975 The Richmond Times-Dispatch
Gary Robertson, "Should State Run Sullins?"

August 24, 1975 The Washington Post
Bill McAllister, "College Offered as Gift to Va 'With No Strings'"

October 5, 1975 The Bristol Herald Courier
"Role for Sullins" (Editorial)

October 28, 1975 The Richmond Times-Dispatch
Charles Cox, "Sullins' Plea to Be Denied, Sources Say"

October 28, 1975 The Richmond News Leader
"Sullins Takeover Idea Abandoned"

April 14, 1976 The Richmond News Leader
"College Takeover Seen"

April 15, 1976 The Richmond News Leader
"City OK's Takeover of Sullins"

July 16, 1976 The Richmond News Leader
"107-Year-Old Sullins College to Close"